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Exploring the Role of ICT in Development: An International Perspective, A Panel Discussion

G Harindranath

University of London, g.harindranath@rhul.ac.uk

Gerald Grant

Carleton University, Gerald_Grant@carleton.ca

Jonathan Liebenau

London School of Economics, liebenau@lse.ac.uk

Sherif Kamel

The American University in Cairo, skamel@aucegypt.edu

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112A. Exploring the Role of ICT in Development: An International Perspective, A Panel Discussion

G. Harindranath
Royal Holloway, University of London,
g.harindranath@rhul.ac.uk

Gerald Grant
Carleton University
gerald_grant@carleton.ca

Jonathan Liebenau
London School of Economics
liebenau@lse.ac.uk

Sherif Kamel
The American University in Cairo
skamel@aucegypt.edu

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Abstract

This panel will bring together a range of experts from around the world to explore the potential role of information and communications technologies (ICT) in socio-economic development. The panel will be highly interactive with each panellist speaking for a short period, which will then be followed by comments from fellow panellists and the audience. The session will be formulated as a series of topical debates on ICT and development with each panellist taking on a particular perspective, drawing from a range of national and regional contexts.

Keywords: ICT, development, electronic government, technology capability, developing countries

Dr Gerald Grant (Carleton University, Canada)

Gerry's talk will address the seemingly paradoxical relationship between ICT and social and economic development. His main argument will centre on the idea that the acquisition and possession of any technology is a necessary but not sufficient feature for advancing social and economic development objectives. Achieving social and economic goals, such as those set out in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, through employment of advanced ICT requires the development of broad-based capabilities that encompasses not only the technological artefacts but also the social and human factors that provide the content, context, and competence for technology acquisition, deployment, and application. Effective ICT application requires the presence of requisite institutions and infrastructures, be they political, social, or technological. ICT are only valuable in the long term the extent to which they are applied in addressing essential economic, social, and political imperatives of citizens, businesses, civil society, and governments. Value-producing investment in ICT is beneficially accomplished within the context of supportive institutional arrangements that facilitate their adoption, assimilation, and application. Gerry will draw on his extensive research experience in Africa.

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Dr Jonathan Liebenau (London School of Economics, UK)

Jonathan will question the effect of ICT for development projects on meeting development goals. For over 20 years development agencies have been criticized for misplaced ambitions, unrealistic expectations, and technology-driven initiatives. Development projects initiated by multilateral bodies, national governments and non-governmental organizations have been remarkably unsuccessful in reaching their own ICT-related goals. Drawing on his research in Central Asia, he will argue that private enterprises have in aggregate, disseminated ICT widely, provided opportunities for large numbers of people to use mobile technologies, and generated sustainable institutions. They have done so through cybercafes, business services

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agencies, and a wide variety of telecommunications services. When compared with development projects, such enterprises are more flexible, more economical, and consequently sustainable. Furthermore, although market driven as opposed to being aimed at poverty reduction, such enterprises have had the effect of bringing ICT directly to far-flung regions throughout the developing world.

Dr Sherif Kamel (The American University in Cairo, Egypt)

Nations around the world, both developed and developing, have been implementing information society and electronic government initiatives in order to bring the benefits of ICT to all citizens. Drawing on his extensive experience from one developing country, namely Egypt, Sherif will explore some of the myths associated with electronic government initiatives in developing countries and discuss some of the serious challenges – social, economic, political and cultural – that need to be addressed before such initiatives can become truly successful and sustainable.

Dr G. Harindranath (Roval Holloway, University of London, UK)

Hari’s talk will explore a number of ICT for development frameworks, and ask if ICT can really play a ‘transformational’ role within development projects. Drawing on some high profile cases from the Indian subcontinent, he will explore conditions that can facilitate sustainable ICT for development projects. Hari will act as panel chair.

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